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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes seven innovative conferences designed to meet the educational and career counseling needs of adults. The conferences were developed at an urban state university, and can be adapted to and adopted by community colleges, private colleges and other universities. The purposes of these conferences were (1) to give educational and career information and encouragement to adults, (2) to give information to state personnel working with adults in community college and other state universities, and (3) to give educational and career information to individuals in policy making positions in industry, labor, education and government. The conferences spoke to current needs of adults in a community without committing the adults or the institution to long term programs. The institution by serving the needs of all ages became a more viable part of the community. (Author)

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Mid-Life Counseling: New Dimensions in Theory and Practice

Innovative Conferences to Meet Adult Needs

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Innovative Conferences to Meet Adult Needs

A series of conferences were developed at the University of South Florida to meet the needs of adults in the area. The University, whose student body numbers approximately 23,000 serves 2700 resident students and approximately 20,000 commuting students in daytime and evening classes. Approximately 8,000 students are over the traditional college age of 18-24. Although the conferences were designed for an urban state university, they could be adopted by and adapted to community colleges, private colleges and other universities.

The purposes of the conferences were 1) to give educational and career information and encouragement to adults, 2) to give information to state personnel working with adults in community colleges and other state universities and 3) to give educational and career information to individuals in policy making positions in industry, labor, education and government. The conferences, held over the past three years have been well received, well attended and are part of an ongoing planning program of the University.

NEED FOR INFORMATION

Innovative programs are needed for adults because colleges have traditionally not provided programs for an older age group.

1. It is difficult for adults who have been out of the educational mainstream to know where to get educational information.
2. Adults are not in the normal progression of education and do not receive information through normal channels.
3. Adults are consumers who want to know how they will spend their money and time in educational institutions.

4. Adults need encouragement to know that they can enter or re-enter colleges and universities and that adults can and do continue to learn.
5. Agencies and industry need information on educational opportunities for employees who have become technically obsolete or who need education and training for job promotion.
6. Personnel working with adults need information to handle the non-traditional aged student coming into a traditional college situation. The recent increase in adults entering colleges finds institutions unprepared.

EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION FOR INDIVIDUALS

The "ReFocus Seminar" was designed to give to adults considering entry or re-entry to USF specific information on what USF has to offer and how it can be obtained. The seminar is so called because the adult at mid-life (the mid-portion of the life span, usually late forties and fifties) is often looking for the opportunity to re-adjust, to find a new center of interest or to concentrate anew.

The program was designed to give information on admission requirements, undergraduate and graduate programs, and special services and programs. Time was provided for questions as well as informal advising. A printed program contained important dates and names and telephone numbers of faculty and staff to contact for more detailed information. Applications, catalogs, brochures, CLEP and GRE information, schedules were made available on display tables.

Adults were reached through newspaper ads, newspaper publicity, in-house newsletters and publications of business and industry, radio and television. "ReFocus" attracted men and women who came for general information without committing themselves. It attracted adults who wanted specific information for individual planning. Attendance ranged from 50 - 100 people. Evaluation questionaires showed that the majority of attendees were degree seeking on a part-time basis in the evening. The age range was 25 to 65 with a majority in the age range of 30 - 45.

This two hour evening program emphasized the positive attributes that an adult brings to the campus: his maturity, his experience, his discipline and his motivation. This, plus the encouragement that other adults have similar apprehensions helped allay his fear of returning to a structured learning situation and competing with younger students. Actual case histories were particularly effective.

"ReFocus", presented annually in the fall quarter,is conducted by a team of 4 to 5 staff members who represent various areas of the University and who are well versed on University policy, procedure and programs. It has been offered successfully in the community and on the campus. The "ReFocus Seminar" is an ongoing program on the main campus and on the branch campuses.

"Its Never Too Late" was an example of a community coordinated program for individuals interested in returning to school. This was a joint endeavor of the YWCA, a community college, a private college and USF. This program provided comprehensive information on local educational opportunities for women considering returning to college. A representative of each of the participating institutions presented an overview of their programs and services for adults as well as the general concerns and problems of women entering or re-entering. In addition, each institution had a mature student who briefly described her experience. This was a highlight of the program. After the general session each of the institutions held briefings to take care of individual concerns and questions.

INFORMATION FOR PERSONNEL WORKING WITH ADULTS

In order to accommodate the growing number of adults returning to campus, personnel working with these adults need information and training on how to work effectively with the non-traditional age student. Two workshops for personnel in the State University System and the Community College System were designed: "New Dimensions in Mid-Life Counseling" and "The Adult as a Total Student".

Personnel working with adults in admissions, registration, continuing education, guidance centers, academic advising attended these one-day workshops. The programs consisted of a keynote address, a resource panel and task force groups. Topics discussed included:

Age Bias in the Work and Educational World

Innovative Counseling Practices and Procedures

Innovative Programs For The Life Long Learner

The Counselor as an Activist

Task forces addressed topics such as: financial aid, admission assessments, career development, campus adjustment, community outreach.

The informal interchange among the participants proved an important aspect of the workshop. Because there are no traditions for the mature student, their needs have been met in innovative ways. These innovative ways can be shared and used on other campuses. To further this exchange a newsletter was instigated for personnel working with adults in the State higher educational system. The workshops will be held on an annual basis.

Another example of a community coordinated program was a seminar for business and industrial personnel working with tuition refund programs for employees. This two-hour program was coordinated with the Chamber of Commerce and other educational institutions in the area. The purpose of this seminar was to acquaint personnel directors with educational opportunities for employees interested in keeping up with their field, in upgrading their position or retraining for a move within an organization.

MID-CAREER CONFERENCES

With a growing concern for mid-career (mid-point in the span of a career) changes brought about by the empty nest, unemployment, job obsolescence, need for second income, job promotion and second careers, USF has sponsored two conferences

on "New Careers at Mid-Life." These conferences were designed for men and women investigating options for change. Speakers addressed topics such as:

Educational Opportunities for Adults

Employment Opportunities at Mid-Life

Pre-Retirement Opportunities

The Adult Learner and Performer

Workshop topics included: internal and external career changes, part-time jobs and volunteerism, entry to the labor market, options of retirement, entry or re-entry to college, and changing life patterns for men and women. These conferences began with a keynote address in the evening followed by a day-long session. A nominal fee was charged plus a fee for testing which was optional.

Adults are hampered in making changes at mid-life because of existing policies which discourage change. The overwhelming response of individuals who wanted to make changes at mid-life was the determining factor to plan a following seminar.

The next seminar: "Mid-Life Work and Learning Options" was intended to reach those in policy making positions in education, industry, labor and government. Hopefully by educating these people to the mid-life problems, changes in policies could be expedited to meet the needs of individuals.

Discussion topics were:

Mid-Life Work Options: Individual Needs and Institution Responses

Work and Retirement: Economic and Mental Well-being

Mid-Life Counseling and Life-Long Learning

Discussion sessions covered the dimensions and possible solutions to these problems: early retirement, work obsolescence, education and counseling, mid-life options for women, mid-career changes.

Publicity for this conference was in national journals plus direct mailing. It was held at a resort hotel beginning with an evening keynote address, followed by one day-long session and one half-day session.

Leaders from industry attending this conference requested that USF sponsor a conference designed to address the particular problems of mid-career in industry.

"Management Looks at the Mid-Career Problem" focused on personnel managers who deal with employees at mid-career. The seminar was divided into three parts: The Individual at Mid-Career, Organization's Perspective Toward Mid-Life, and Programs and Options for Industry. Some of the topics discussed were:

Mid-Career Plateaus and Precipices

Changes Within and Without Organizations

Mid-Life Personal and Family Dilemas

Age Discrimination Legislation

Tuition Refund Plan

Pension Reform

Career Mobility

Education and Training

Again the format was an evening keynote address followed by a day-long workshop. Discussion leaders and presenters were industrial consultants of national reputation, key personnel figures from the home offices of our nations largest industries, and USF professors. The expertise of these leaders in the formal presentations and the sharing of the participants in the working sessions made for a dynamic conference. The participants came well prepared because of their concern and because they had read many of the books and articles in a suggested reading list sent out prior to the conference.

The planning of this conference was done by an advisory committee from industry, the Chamber of Commerce and University personnel.

OUTCOME OF CONFERENCES

The conferences benefitted the limited number of adults who attended. The accompanying publicity: radio, TV, newspapers, journals, direct mailing disseminated information on a wide span. This information was educational to the public at large.

it made the public aware of what an institution was doing to address the needs of adults. This in turn helped the adult to realize that education is not only for the traditional age college student but also for those who want and need to be life long learners.

The feedback of conference evaluations gave the institution an insight into the needs and concerns of adults. This can be valuable information for future planning and future contacts.

The involvement of the university staff helped spread the needs and concerns of older students. Education is sometimes needed for the educators.

Conferences provided a support system for those who attended. Adults who attended "ReFocus Seminars" felt encouraged by knowing that other adults were also considering educational opportunities. Personnel directors met others concerned with similar problems of mid-careers and could exchange solutions plus make future contacts. College personnel learned about successful programs at other institutions. The conferences spoke to the current needs of adults without committing adults and staff to long term programs.

Cooperation between the university and community organizations made for good community relations and support.

FUTURE OF CONFERENCES

Mid-Life conferences have unlimited possibilities as to topics to explore. Future possibilities include target groups such as ministers, lawyers, doctors, engineers.

Because of the projected shifts in population patterns, the adult at mid-life and beyond is in a logical position to fill the empty educational seats of the traditional age college students.

. . .

As we continue to learn more about adult development, we will be better able to meet their needs by providing education and counseling options for career and personnel development.

As we continue to reach out into the community through cooperative programs, the bonds between "town and gown" are strengthened. An educational institution, by serving the needs of all age groups, can become a more viable part of the community it serves.

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